



What's Up With *Alaska Park Science*?

By Robert Winfree and Kimberly Melendez

Introduction

During the last few years, *Alaska Park Science* has received several awards and praise for content and design, but good peer reviews don't necessarily tell us whether a publication really makes a difference for its readers. So... how effective is *Alaska Park Science* at interpreting scientific and scholarly information for people who can use and benefit from it? The NPS Alaska Regional Office posed that question to a panel of seven professional science educators, journal editors, and members of the NPS Inventory and Monitoring science communicators group in 2010.

The panelists employed a set of qualitative and quantitative measures of effectiveness to get at the answer, including interviews of a cross section of 65 *Alaska Park Science* readers, contributors, sponsors and others. About 80% of the people they talked to were Alaska residents and about two-thirds of them self-identified with the career field of education (including teachers, interpreters, science writers and public information specialists); with the others identifying themselves as researchers, resource managers, or other. Overall, these readers liked the journal's style and format, with 90% or more saying that *Alaska Park Science* was appropriate, useful, effective and important to them and for the National Park Service. About the same number said that *Alaska Park Science* did not duplicate information that they received from other sources, and said that it would be difficult or impossible for them to find this kind of information anywhere else. Most seemed to like the multidisciplinary mix of thematic and general issues, though some indicated clear preferences for particular topics and

themes. The vast majority of these readers preferred to receive printed copies of *Alaska Park Science*, although nearly half also wanted access to digital editions, because they used the printed and digital editions in different ways.

Upon completing their review, the panel members discussed their top ten recommendations with NPS managers and with the journal board. The panel's top recommendations were to ensure long-term funding and staffing for the journal, and to continue to produce the journal in both printed and digital editions at least twice a year. Many of their suggestions have already been implemented, such as the revamped web site, use of social media, minor design changes, email subscription options, rotating advisory board positions, and expanded approaches for seeking reader feedback. We're still working on other suggestions, some of which will take time and resources to accomplish. A copy of the panel's full report and recommendations is available at <http://1.usa.gov/jIn03T>

Following receipt of the panel's report, journal staff received feedback from another group of readers who contacted us to request copies of the journal. This second group of 233 readers identified themselves as researchers (44%), educators (37%), and resource managers (22%); with librarians (10%) and other professions (11%) filling out the group. Several readers aligned with more than one category, so these percentages total more than 100%. Most indicated that APS contained about the right amount of information for them, with only 2% suggesting that there was too much information and one person suggesting "not enough". As with the first group, most of these readers preferred the printed editions, and three-quarters shared their copies with several other readers, for an average of four readers per printed copy. Only 12% indicated that they had used Internet editions of the journal.

Among those who mentioned favorite issues, most readers simply said "All", or listed several issues, usually including the recent *Park Science in the Arctic* symposium proceedings in their list. These readers also suggested topics of particular interest to them. Three-quarters of the suggestions clustered into ten general categories, listed here in approximate order of frequency, with the most frequently mentioned topics listed first:

- Climate Change
- Wildlife
- Geology
- "All topics"
- Oceans and fisheries
- Cultural
- Archaeology
- Alaska history
- Ecology and ecosystems, including fire
- Social Science, including economics and recreation

The journal's advisory board and staff is pleased that the multidisciplinary approach to the physical, biological, cultural, and social sciences, history and related humanities works for our readers. **We plan to use these suggestions to identify new topics for articles and focused issues. We'd like to hear from our other readers, and especially from anyone who has discovered *Alaska Park Science* through Internet searches, social networking, or through citations in other periodicals.** We're interested in what you liked about it and whether you were able to use the information, and of course any suggestions for new articles or other improvements. You can email your comments to: AKR_Alaska_Park_Science@NPS.gov

Figure 1. Previous issue covers of *Alaska Park Science*.

NPS photograph